

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Claims 1-49 (Canceled).

50. (Currently amended) A method of protecting and/or strengthening a keratin material comprising applying to said keratin material a composition comprising at least one organometallic compound obtained from at least one metallic precursor chosen from formula (la), below:

M-(OR₁)_n (la)

wherein:

- M denotes a metal atom chosen from the transition metals of groups Ib to VIIb of the Periodic Table, group VIII of the Periodic Table, the lanthanide group of the Periodic Table, aluminum, silicon, boron, tin, magnesium, alkali metals and alkaline-earth metals;

- n denotes the valency of the metal;

- R₁, which may be identical or different, is chosen from linear and branched, saturated and unsaturated hydrocarbon-based radicals containing with 1 to 30 carbon atoms; and

wherein said composition is applied to said keratin material in an amount effective to obtain at least one of harder nails, stronger nails, less brittle nails, nails which no longer split, and nails which no longer crack.

51. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 50, wherein said at least one organometallic compound is obtained by at least one of partial and total hydrolysis of said at least one metallic precursor and partial and total condensation of said at least one metallic precursor.

52. (Currently amended) A method according to Claim 50, wherein R₁ is chosen from linear and branched, saturated and unsaturated hydrocarbon-based radicals containing with 1 to 6 carbon atoms, optionally interrupted by and/or substituted with 1-20 hetero atoms chosen from O, N, S and P.

53. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 50, wherein said amount is effective to at least one of quickly and durably improve the rigidity of said keratin material and quickly and durably improve cohesion of said keratin material.

54. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 53, wherein said amount is effective to quickly and durably improve the rigidity of said keratin material.

55. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 53, wherein said amount is effective to quickly and durably improve the cohesion of said keratin material.

56. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 53, wherein said amount is effective to quickly and durably improve the rigidity and the cohesion of said keratin material.

57. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 50, wherein said keratin material is chosen from the toenails and the fingernails.

58. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 50, wherein said amount is effective to reduce the brittleness of weakened nails.

59. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 58, wherein said amount is effective to reduce the brittleness of weakened nails chosen from striated nails, cracked nails, soft nails, supple nails, and nails which have a tendency to split.

60. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 50, wherein said metal atom M is chosen from titanium, zirconium, aluminum, iron, tin, and silicon.

61. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 60, wherein said metal atom M is chosen from titanium and silicon.

62. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 50, wherein said at least one metallic precursor is chosen from:

- tetramethoxysilane, silicon tetraethoxide, titanium tetraethoxide, tin tetraethoxide, titanium tetraisopropoxide, silicon tetraisopropoxide, tin tetraisopropoxide, tin tetrabutoxide, titanium tetrabutoxide, and silicon tetrabutoxide.

63. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 50, wherein said composition comprises a sol of said at least one organometallic compound.

64. (Previously presented) A method according to claim 63, wherein said composition comprises 1% to 100% by weight of said organometallic compound sol.

65. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 63, wherein said composition comprises 1.5% to 95% by weight of said organometallic compound sol.

66. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 63, wherein said composition comprises 10% to 90% by weight of said organometallic compound sol.

67. (Previously presented) A method according to Claim 63, wherein said composition comprises 12% to 50% by weight of said organometallic compound sol.

68. (Currently amended) A process for treating a keratin material which comprises applying to said keratin material a composition comprising at least one organometallic compound obtained from at least one metallic precursor chosen from: formula (Ia), below:

M-(OR₁)_n

(la)

wherein:

- M denotes a metal atom chosen from the transition metals of groups Ib to VIIb of the Periodic Table, group VIII of the Periodic Table, the lanthanide group of the Periodic Table, aluminum, silicon, boron, tin, magnesium, alkali metals and alkaline-earth metals;
- n denotes the valency of the metal;
- R₁, which may be identical or different, is chosen from linear and branched, saturated and unsaturated hydrocarbon-based radicals ~~containing~~ with 1 to 30 carbon atoms, and wherein said composition is applied to said keratin material in an amount effective to reduce the brittleness of human nails.